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SUBJECT: U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERTS VISIT AUSTRIA

¶1. (U) To promote U.S.-Austria environmental cooperation, the Foreign Ministry sponsored an intensive week-long program from Aug. 7-14 for a group of 10 American environmental experts. The group included representatives from federal, state, and local governments; Congress; universities; business and business groups; and environmental NGOs. The program included meetings with government and political representatives, but was largely focused on showing off Austrian environmental technology.

¶2. (U) At dinner with Embassy representatives October 9, reactions from the group to the first days of the program varied considerably. A U.S. Chamber of Commerce VP was unimpressed with Austrian technology and very concerned about the focus on "cap and trade" models for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, a NYC official thought her city could learn much from what Vienna is doing. The Staff Director for the House Subcommittee on Water Resources/Environment also thought the U.S. could learn from Austria.

¶3. (U) Despite their differing views, the participants were all eager to follow-up the visit in practical ways. A California professor hoped to organize a California/U.S.-Austria conference in 2008 on environmental studies in Austria. An expert from the American Council on Renewable Energy saw opportunities for selling U.S. renewable fuels in Austria; Embassy officials plan to follow-up and support this idea. Even the Chamber of Commerce participant thought it would be useful to arrange a visit to Austria by a small group of experts who could engage in public diplomacy on the U.S. business community's environmental activities.  
McCaw